

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

January 7, 2006

MOSES REVIVES PLAN TO PROTECT UTILITY CUSTOMERS IN WINTERTIME

FORT WAYNE – As Hoosier homeowners face another winter of crippling heating bills, State Rep. Win Moses (D-Fort Wayne) today announced he has re-filed legislation that would ensure utility customers would not have to pay outrageous charges in order to have service restored.

Joined by the Rev. Michael Latham, president of the Fort Wayne NAACP, Moses provided details on House Bill 1094, which would restrict the amount that utilities can charge customers who want to have their service reconnected. The measure also would require utility companies to provide reconnection services 365 days a year.

"As the price of oil and gas has soared skyward, all of us approached the wintertime with great fear about the size of heating bills that we would face," Moses said. "There is a Help Thy Neighbor Heating Fund program that uses public and private donations to help Hoosiers pay their heating bills.

"However, I think we can do more to protect the needs of utility customers, and perhaps help utility companies learn a little bit about being charitable to those who want to pay their bills on time, but are being forced into a difficult situation by excessive heating costs," he continued.

The proposal would allow utility companies to charge customers no more than the actual cost of reconnecting services, along with a security deposit that would equal an average monthly bill. Moses said all previous charges would have to be paid prior to reconnection.

"In order to have services restored, some utility customers are being required to pay security deposits that are as much as one-third of the amount they pay for utility service in an entire year," Moses noted. "By adhering to such policies, utility companies are virtually ensuring that these people will remain in dire financial straits for a long time to come.

"We also want to make sure that customers can get their services reconnected as quickly as possible," he added. "Right now, if your utility service is stopped on a Friday, you have to wait until Monday to get it restarted, even if you have settled accounts. They should not have to endure such a delay, particularly if they have lived up to their obligations."

Moses has filed similar legislation in past sessions, and even seen the proposal passed in the House. Problems have cropped up in the Indiana Senate to keep the bill from becoming law.

"Some officials have taken a strong stand on behalf of protecting those who are less fortunate during the wintertime, and by passing this measure in 2006, the Indiana General Assembly can send a clear message of support for that stand," Moses said. "Families should not have to be forced to choose between heating or eating, and this legislation will make sure it won't have to happen."

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